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ARGENTINA: Military Retirements

President Videla, in an effort to strengthen his position, has used the annual December military promotion and reassignment process to retire several army generals who have been at odds with his relatively moderate policies. Despite some grumbling, there appears to be no serious move afoot to thwart Videla's action.

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It appears that a total of eight generals will leave active duty. At least three of them are prominent members of the so-called hard-line wing of the army which favor harsh national security measures. They also oppose early conciliatory gestures toward civilian groups.

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The retirement of these hard-liners reflects the growing confidence of Videla and his supporters and apparently is intended as a warning to others who hold such views.

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The three retiring officers had occupied second-echelon positions, and their departure does not guarantee an end to pressures from conservatives. Two of the most prominent hard-line spokesmen remain in cabinet posts and two others command key regional army corps.

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If Videla manages to check the hard-liners, he will be in a far better position to proceed with important political moves he reportedly favors. Chief among these is the relaxation of at least some of the stringent controls on organized labor.

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Labor is the most influential civilian force and, potentially, the most important source of serious resistance to the junta. Growing worker restiveness is undoubtedly contributing to the President's resolve to ease some of these controls soon. Conservative officers have thus far blocked efforts to begin the normalization of labor activities.

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